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'TAKE BACK YOUR CAMPFIRE'
A Study of Local Level Perceptions
to Electric Fencing in the Framework
of Binga's Campfire Programme.¹

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Introduction

Today it is generally accepted that wildlife can be fully conserved by involving local people in its management (Bromley and Carnea, 1989: 10; Berkes and Farvar, 1989: 3). The argument is that benefits to the people who live with the resources will give value to wildlife. Local people will also start to regard wildlife as their own and, because of that, will stop poaching them (Murphree, 1991; Makombe, 1993).

In Zimbabwe, the government has realised that continuing to alienate people from wildlife management - especially those who bear the cost of living with wildlife - will not result in the conservation of resources (Murindagomo, 1989: 29). The government has concluded that alienation leads those people who pay the price for living with wildlife to regard it as a pest that has to be totally eliminated. It was with a view to conserve wildlife, as well as to develop local people, that the government introduced Campfire². In the Campfire programme, a district council can apply for appropriate authority from the Department of National Parks and Wild Life Management to manage all animals in its jurisdiction. Once it receives this authority, the Council is expected to pass it down to the local villages which live with, and pay the price for living with, wild animals. Such villages can then sell both hunting rights and some of the trophy animals to safari hunters contracted to operate in communal lands. Villagers use any revenue generated according to their own agreed formula.

However, in practice Councils continue to retain power and exhibit a corresponding reluctance to pass it down to lower levels (Murombedzi, 1992). The situation in most districts is that Councils continue to make all wildlife decisions on behalf of the village. For instance, the Councils continue to enter into contracts with safari operators on behalf of the people; with villagers simply receiving money. For many the money has not been much, and whatever came was used to develop schools and clinics. The revenue does not go directly to the household. It is for this reason, therefore, that many local people continue to look at agriculture as the solution to household poverty.

Safari operators, whose duty is also to protect villagers from wildlife, together with Councils in Zimbabwe, have tried to introduce electric fences to communal people since the beginning of Campfire. As conceived by safari operators, electric fences would be constructed right around homesteads, arable lands and grazing areas.

² Short for Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources.

For safari operators, electric fencing in communal areas represents an exciting project. Currently, hunting and shooting is conducted in places inhabited by humans. Electric fences would create free hunting zones. In these zones, hunters and clients would shoot without fearing that locals might get accidentally shot by stray bullets. Operators also want fences as these would protect human life and property from wildlife damage. For many of the safari operators, shooting young marauding elephants does not constitute good business sense. They say that shooting young troublesome elephants, as is demanded by many angry farmers, might deprive them of revenue. In fences, operators see a solution in sparing young animals from the gun, and allowing them to grow into viable mammals which can earn high revenue. Finally, safari operators want a fence that would keep people out of the wild. By keeping people out of certain areas the operator is able to create an image of wild Africa which he knows will sell well to overseas clients. The more he can create an attractive hunting environment for his adventurous overseas clients, the more viable his business will be. For safari operators, electric fences would maximise Campfire's potential to realise high profits which would benefit local people.

In Binga, the local Safari operator has - over the years - been trying to interest local people into accepting electric fences. In 1994, the Safari operator, together with the Council, started a project that was intended to surround Kabuba village with an electric fence. The aim of this paper is to discuss how the fence was introduced and how local people responded at every stage of the project. In addition, this paper traces how local people rejected the fencing project and threatened to pull out from Campfire on which this project was based. The data is also given in order to lay ground for analysis on why peasants generally resist technology which appears to be viable. Before this, I give a brief introduction to the district and the village targeted for the fence.

A Brief Description of Binga District and the Study Village

Binga district is made up of 1130.926 hectares of land. Of this, 103.500 hectares is under forest, while 235 526 hectares is under wildlife and 791.100 is under communal settlement. Much of Binga is dry. Though some areas receive over a 1000mm of rainfall per year, the majority of places receive below 700mm. The area has a large population of wildlife which includes elephant, lion, buffalo, and impala.

The district's administrative offices are in Binga. This is where the Council, which is composed of locally elected and executive staff, meets to discuss

matters that affect the district. The system of local government is as follows: A village is led by the village chairman. Six villages make up a Vidco which is under the leadership of the Vidco chairman. Six vidcos make up a ward and this is led by a councillor. The Councillor represents the ward at the District Council. Besides councillors, there are council executives who are government employees under the Ministry of Local Government. Council executives are powerful and can overrule the decisions of council. There is also a system of chieftaincy in the district. There are well over twenty chiefs in Binga. The authority of the chief may be confined within the ward but in some cases it spans over more than two wards. The chiefs are assisted by village heads located in villages. Village heads are rivals of vidco chairmen whom they accuse of usurping their jobs. Chiefs sit in council meetings where they are not powerful. They attend meetings as ex. officio members. In their areas chiefs remain influential. It is probable that their influence derives from their control of, and their right to allocate, land (Dzingirai, 1994 forthcoming).

One of the actors in the district, constantly finding himself the target of the people, is the Safari operator who has been awarded the contract to hunt in the area. He pays a concession fee to hunt in the area and also pays for trophy animals he shoots in the area. One of his roles is to protect villagers and their crops from wildlife. This he must do by shooting any animal which the people report as problematic. The Safari operator says that unbridled killing will jeopardise possibilities of more revenue. In the end, Council will get very little revenue for building clinics and road mending. Villagers are, however, worried about the damage caused by elephants on their agriculture which caters for their household needs. They, therefore, want menacing wildlife eliminated.

The village, which the Council and the Safari operator wanted to surround with an electric fence, is called Kabuba. It lies in Chief Sinamagonde's area, south-west of Binga. The village can be reached by a dirt road from Binga District Council, some 130km away. It is also linked to Lusulu Tsetse Control Camp, about 30km away by a track. The village is in a valley and is surrounded by mountains. In the north is the Chizarira National Park, which is linked by another track that passes through to Gokwe. The only school, Kabuba, is located in that small valley. The village grows cotton which, too often, is threatened by marauding elephants from Chizarira located in the east. The Safari operator is the one who is tasked to deal with problem animals. To date, the people have been dissatisfied with his performance and some have appealed to the chief and the police to have him ousted from the area. Some people say he does not attend to the wildlife problems at all; others say he delays coming to their rescue. Still others say that even when

he does come, he does not shoot those elephants reported to be threats, as is expected by the villagers.

The Introduction of the Fence in Kabuba

At a meeting on the 16th June, 1994 the Council Campfire Manager and the Safari operator came to the village. He told the people that Council, together with the Safari operator, wanted to introduce an electric fence. At first some people rejected the idea and did not want any debate about it. It was a bad thing that was not to be entertained in the village. Some of the people queried the efficacy of the fence project. Such people readily recalled the evidence from other districts where the fence failed to protect the villagers from wildlife. As one farmer remarked :

" We have heard from other people in Nyaminyami that elephants broke through the fence and proceeded to damage the fields. If the Council wants to protect our property from wildlife why not do what we say is the solution. Kill all the troublesome elephants. They wont be any problem thereafter. Smith used to kill elephants he found in the villages and because of that we used not to have a wildlife problem. "

Some people within the village saw the fence as an attempt to bar them from the use of the natural resources. They pointed out that the Safari operator wanted to create a private farm out of their land, and within their midst. It was argued that the village depended on the forest for poles, thatching grass and edible insects. Villagers argued that the Safari operator wanted to prevent people from accessing these resources.

Of greater concern to the whole community was the belief that the fence would take away some of their land for agriculture. They saw in the proposal an attempt to reintroduce white colonialism.

There was the feeling that the 'white man' wanted to deprive the villagers of their land and eventually make them his servants working for him. Those who had adequate land felt that the fence would deprive their descendants of land to do agriculture. The village head remarked :

" Where will our children get the land from. If they go the west there is the Zambezi and to the east is the Chizarira Game Reserve. "

Those who had been put in protected villages during the war immediately thought that the fence was meant to constrain their movement. They saw no freedom in the proposed fence. Throughout the meeting they said that they would oppose constraining protected villages.

The Safari operator, together with the Campfire manager, dispelled all these fears. They said that the electric fence would not deny them access to the resources. All those who wanted to have access to the resources would do so. Farmers would continue to graze their cattle. The Safari operator admitted that the fence would not remove the wildlife menace totally. It was, however, going to reduce it. The Council's representative and the Safari operator took turns to say that the fencing project was not intended to hinder agriculture. Rather, it was intended to encourage agriculture. On his part, the Safari operator vowed to donate a tractor and farming inputs such as fertilisers and seeds for all the people who would agree to live within the fence. A borehole too would be given to the local people. This would be drilled at a place decided on by local people and their leaders. He reiterated that the electric fence would result in effective hunting and good agriculture.

The Safari operator added that the labour to put up the fence would be drawn from the village. The boundaries would be drawn by the community and not by him. He told them that the fence's boundaries would not remain fixed but could be revised to suit the agrarian needs of the people. The fence was theirs, he said. Its planning and implementation would be village based.

After much deliberation people agreed to the idea. The villagers said they would draw the boundaries.

It was in the spirit of this agreement that the community drew the boundary, which they put about four kilometres from the mountain range bordering the village and waited for both the Safari operator and Council to bring the fencing material and the promised goods.

In July 1994, the Safari operator came early in the morning and started drilling the borehole 4km from the mountain range bordering the village. People heard the sound of drilling machines and were only to discover that it was the Safari operator sinking the borehole at a place they had not agreed. Those who drilled the borehole never made a call at the village head's home. When people went to inquire what was going on, the Safari operator told them that the fence would follow the mountain range surrounding the village. All the land beyond the mountains would be used for hunting.

When asked why he was not accepting the boundary which the people had drawn he said that this did not give him enough hunting land. He said the village's proposed boundary incorporated some of his best hunting spots where he occasionally shot elephants. He said his own boundary would result in effective hunting which would mean more money to the village.

A few weeks later the Safari operator drove in his jeep into the village. During this trip he met a group of boys herding cattle. It is reported that he shot a dog belonging to one of the boys. He suspected the dogs to be poachers' dogs. About the same time he told a group of villagers that the borehole had been drilled to attract animals and that it was not for the them.

It was then that local debate about the Safari operator and the fencing scheme started. Some people said if the safari operator could just walk in an area settled by people and started to dig wells without the knowledge of the people, surely this was arrogance. Some saw, in the Safari operator's unilateral declaration of the positioning of the fence, a blatant violation of the rules previously agreed. The village head remarked that local people felt offended by the operator's action. The village head remarked :

" What he means is that we spent the whole day on that first meeting planning nothing. Why did he call the meeting? Why did they agree with us about the terms of the fence if they did not mean to stick to these? They simply wanted to have our approval and then after that cheat us. The whole idea was a hoax. "

Some debated the implications of what the white had done. They said that because he broke promises and covenants, and treated people in an arrogant and authoritarian manner, the Safari operator showed himself to be a bad person to work with. They said because he went about killing dogs belonging to the community, the Safari operator proved to be a man who should not be trusted. A Vidco headman remarked :

" What assurance is there that he would keep his word concerning the people having access to resources inside the fence, or that the boundaries would shift as and when the community demanded. "

There were some who began to think in broader terms, speculating on the motives of the Safari operator. A Vidco chairman put it thus:

" It was only after he came secretly and started sinking

men of fell upon them and beat them up. Then, at the end of October, the village - together with some Ndebele and Shona immigrants - banded together and stormed the Safari operator's temporary Camp. The learner hunter was absent. They burned the Camp down to the ground. A week later the Safari

Operator wrote to the Council that he was dropping the project from which he had lost over half a million dollars worth of property. He demanded that, as part of the compensation, his lease be extended for another five years. He demanded cash for the balance. The Council had no choice.

Conclusion

Although the situation is rather confused and intertwined, it is possible to isolate, in a systematic way, why villagers objected to the proposed technology :

1. People objected to the electric fence because they did not have sufficient information about what the technology would entail. This applies more to the early stage of the fence.
2. Villagers rejected the technology because the fence would deprive them of their vital natural resources such as land, grazing pastures, poles, thatching grass, edible insects, etc. Of significance was the fact that Campfire revenue from this project would not be able to satisfy household needs.
3. Local people objected to the fence because they felt slighted and ignored, particularly in its implementation stage. The Safari operator rejected local views about where the borehole and the fence were to be located.
4. Many people felt that the people who introduced the fence were dishonest. The Safari operator broke the agreement on where the bore hole would be, and the boundary of the village as drawn by the local people. The fact that the Safari operator and Council failed to honour their promises, led locals to doubt other pledges made.
5. Villagers objected to the fence because those introducing it did not respect them. The shooting of the dog revealed that the Safari operator was not only arrogant and disrespectful, but also authoritarian.

boreholes that we 'read ' his plans. We knew that the white man was like a boy courting a girl, using a sweet tongue and promises. We knew that he would not keep his promises of providing fertilisers, of the tractors and the shifting boundaries. We realised that, once the fence had been put in place, he would not allow us to have access. He was creating his own farm, his own 'national parks' in which even dogs would not be allowed to pass. "

During this time opposition to the fence was expressed freely at beer parties and churches. People felt this spoke about how the project would deprive them of their land and the natural resources. They complained that the revenue from Campfire would not solve their household problem. Letters were sent to the Council expressing opposition to the project. When people sensed that Council and the Safari operator would go ahead with the fence, some started questioning Campfire. People said that it was because of Campfire that all these bad things were taking place. An elder in the village remarked :

" Campfire is now ransoming everything that we have. First it was the animals. We no longer are allowed to kill animals. Now it is our land. How will we be able to survive without land. Campfire can not look after us. But as for this... let it be known that if they (Safari operator and Council) do not want to put the fence where we want, then we do not want their fencing including their Campfire. "

The elder's remarks summarised public opinion.

A month after the elder spoke these things, the Safari operator drove his trucks full of equipment and workers for the fencing project. The workers pitched up tents and on site offices on top of the mountain. Although the Safari operator himself did not stay at the Camp for a long time, he left his learner hunter to supervise the progress of the work.

Work began in earnest in August and for a month things went smoothly. In October there were drunken people who would habitually and conveniently pass by the fence and scoff at the learner hunter. Later there were isolated incidents of poles disappearing and being uprooted. These increased during the first half of the month. A report was made by the Safari operator to the Council with the result that a police detail, together with Council gameguards, was despatched. No sooner had they tried to tell people to stop what they were doing, and to give way to the joint project, than a group of

6. Villagers objected to the fence because the operator did not want to exhaust solutions which they proffered. Because the Safari operator had historically failed to kill problem animals, people saw in the electric fence another attempt to spare the damned creatures. The electric fence must be rejected.

What then are the conclusions of this study? What can it add to the debate about why peasants generally reject technology? For technology to be successful, and to be adopted by people, it is necessary that it seeks to build on what people already have rather than reduce their current gains (Bailey, 1977). It must add to the livelihood of the targeted people. Secondly, it must be that the people introducing the change must respect all covenants hitherto agreed. Any revisions and subsequent modification must, even in cases where they are done in the interest of the targeted people, be mutually agreed. Thirdly, those intervening must show genuine respect for the people they work with. Among other things, that means respecting local protocol and conducting oneself in the expected way. Fourthly, those intervening must be willing to implement existing alternatives before they can convince the people that the new technology can work.

If those introducing changes ignore these rules, it is possible that their potentially useful technology will be rejected. The tragic storming of the Safari operator's camp, and the destruction of valuable equipment, bears testimony to the point that the targeted community will devise means, dramatic if necessary, to resist the change (Dzingirai, 1993). It is also possible that the introduced technology may have the unintended effect of causing the people to reject even the basis upon which the technology is founded. In the case described, the project caused locals to ask for the suspension of Campfire. The project thus threatened to reverse national attempts to conserve wildlife and its effort to use it as a vehicle for local development.

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